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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the predominant aesthetics of American public television's contributors and viewers. These aesthetic perspectives are elaborated in relation to specific historic, institutional, and political trends in American society. The paper traces public television usage and support as the product of confusing and sometimes contradictory cultural forces--forces whose origins predate both television and film. The paper argues that these broad forces continue to exert influence on the way many Americans, particularly public television enthusiasts, interact with this extraordinarily realistic medium. The paper also invites speculation on and reexamination of a number of widely held beliefs about television as a medium, and public television in particular: (1) the notion that television is a monolithic medium; (2) misleading conceptualizations of television as a revolutionary medium; (3) the idea that television is a lower-status popular art form largely because the most prevalent American television practices have developed in opposition to both the precepts of formal education and the value hierarchy of consciousness in Western society; and (4) the views that television is an unusually coercive and explicit medium with a singular, and somewhat unavoidable message. The paper argues that changes in form, aesthetics, and content are evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and a long term perspective is in order. (Nine notes are included, and 43 references are appended.) (MS)

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The Forces and Constituencies of Public Television:

A Study in Media Aesthetics and Intentions

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Historical Trends and Constituencies

Now that the first toddlers to watch Sesame Street are moving into their mid-twenties, it is difficult to think of public television (PTV) as anything but a well entrenched institution. Six-out-of-ten American households presently claim to watch public television on a weekly basis and three-out-of-ten say they have contributed to a local PTV station (PBS, 1985e, p. 2). This seemingly broad interest belies the service's turbulent development and the historic marginality of its audience and financial support.[1]

The growth of PTV from its meager beginnings coincided with demographic and attitudinal changes within the United States. The proportion of the population that had some exposure to college increased from 16.8 percent in 1960 to 24.2 percent in 1970 to 31.9 percent in 1980 (Bower, 1985, p. 9). Audience surveys by both Steiner (1963) and Bower (1973, 1985) found that these better educated Americans tended to be more critical of television as a medium and generally claimed to want more informative programming. In addition, PTV signal coverage increased until nearly every American home could receive at least one PTV signal. The baby boom also swelled the proportions of young adults and toddlers within the population, groups to which many of PTV's more recent programming strategies were particularly targeted.

Shifts in programming strategies from the classroom-teacher format of "educational television" in favor of the entertaining softer-educational programs of PTV also increased audience accessibility. Beginning in the 1970s, programs aimed specifically at children, such as Sesame Street and 3-2-1 Contact, pleased both parents and children by providing a mixture of

the skills taught in formal education along with fast pacing and humor. These kinds of shifts in programming along with the demographic changes occurring in America helped expand the parameters of the PTV audience, so that by 1980, Bower (1985, pp. 49-56) could use only one demographic descriptor to define the PTV audience: "the well educated," a group whose proportions had swelled over the previous two decades.[2]

The federal tax dollars that fueled PTV's dramatic growth in the 1970s began to dry up in the 1980s, forcing PTV stations to turn directly to their expanding audiences for support.[3] As a result, voluntary viewer contributions now represent public television's greatest single funding source. But PBS data (1980, 1985c, 1985e) suggest that there are demographic distinctions between the masses who watch PTV, and those who make voluntary contributions. PTV contributors tend to be older, more socioeconomically upscale, more likely to be college graduates, more disproportionately white, more inclined to live in smaller one or two-person households, and more likely to subscribe to pay or cable TV and own a VCR or computer, than are PTV viewers in general.[4] Thus, while the PTV viewing audience has expanded beyond its original narrow parameters, the viewers who now contribute to PTV bear much closer resemblance to the narrowly defined demographic group that watched ETV in the 1950s and early 1960s.

An Analysis of Cultural Forces and PTV

This paper attempts to outline the predominant aesthetics of American public television's contributors and viewers, groups with which the author closely identifies. These aesthetic perspectives are elaborated in relation to specific historic, institutional, and political trends in American society. As such, the essay tracks public television usage and

support as the product of confusing and sometimes contradictory cultural forces; forces whose origins predate both television and film. Finally, the claim is made that these broad forces continue to exert influence on the way many Americans, particularly public teleivsion enthusiasts, interact with the extraordinarily realistic medium.

The piece draws upon a variety of sources to make its argument. Exemplar quotes from PTV viewers and people who voluntarily contributed to public television are used within the text. These quotes come from interviews conducted in contract and academic research (Schaefer 1985, 1987) at PTV station KUED in Salt Lake City. It is the author's hope that the excerpts present audience attitudes and opinions in a manner that illustrates the consciousness of contemporary PTV viewers and supporters.

Although the histories of Powell (1962), Burke (1972), and Rowland (1986), along with the quantitativeaudience analyses of Steiner (1963), Bower (1973; 1985) and Rubin (1984), are integral components to the central arguments of the paper, the research effort adopts the broader perspective called for by Klaus Bruhn Jensen (1987). Jensen proposed looking beyond historic events and demographics to create an integrated understanding of the various factors that influence media reception. As a result, the paper deals with the issues of media structure and decoding. In the process, it draws theoretical guidance from several texts which fall primarily within two disparate disciplinary perspectives; cultural criticism and semiotics.[5]

Tracking the Aesthetics of PTV Support

PTV viewers and contributors characterize the experience of watching public television as being quite different from that of viewing commercial television. This perception has a great deal to do with the uses

and gratifications associated with each of the two services. While PTV is recognized as an informational, educational, and entertaining alternative; commercial television is assessed perjoratively as a pervasively popular and dominating entertainment medium.

> . . . I think that the programming quality, and the choice of subjects, and the issues that are discussed, and the topics, even the funny ones, that's so important to present to the American public as an educational tool. As alternative programming, or as a main programming if they don't want to watch trash. As a presentation that is family oriented, wholesome, educational, entertaining. I just think it's lovely in all aspects of its quality and message. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 56)

> I'm not so sure that the majority of people who go home and turn on the TV care what they see. They're hypnotized; it really doesn't matter what's on as long as the colors are changing and moving in front of them, they're entertained. . . . You ask them what they watched and they have no idea what they watched, but they've been entertained for the last three hours, . . . (Schaefer, 1985, p. 7)

The above excerpts illustrate the extent to which PTV supporters equate the gratifications of PTV viewing as dependent upon receiving programming messages and contents. In this sense they describe their use of the medium as goal directed. In contrast, they tend to perceive the entertainment gratifications associated with commerical television viewing as dependent upon an aesthetic experience involving moving arrangements of forms, shapes, and colors. Therefore, with commerical television the process of viewing is the gratification. Other than transitory pleasure, there is not necessarily an end product to viewing. In this sense, content is more or less equivalent and form can be considered preeminent. In comparison, the process of viewing PTV is considered entertaining, but there is also an end product to reception, namely information gain.

Therefore it should not be too surprising to hear that the educational gratifications sought by PTV contributors are often accompanied by claims

of deliberate program selection according to content and information. These claims tend to identify supporters with the type of instrumental TV usage described by Alan Rubin (1984) as purposefully information oriented, selective, and goal directed, without being frequent. In contrast, PTV contributors preferred not to be associated with Rubin's notion of ritualized TV usage, which he described as a more frequent, habitual, entertainment oriented way of passing time. Hence, it would seem that PTV supporters are trying to align themselves with a less hedonistic, more purposeful, learning centered use of the medium. This finding complements the earlier work of Steiner (1963) and Bower (1973, 1985) who found that the well educated groups from which PTV supporters are most likely to be drawn were more inclined to be critical of using television strictly for entertainment and relaxation purposes.

This type of instrumental usage goes against the grain of prior television research. Both Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, and Roberts (1978) and Pearl (1982) described televison as primarily an entertainment medium in which people first decide whether to watch or not, and then make relatively less important decisions about what to watch. Indeed, Cohen (1982) and Schaefer (1987) noted that PTV viewers' claims to be unusually selective or infrequent users of television were often not borne out by the reality of their viewing practices, confirming what Steiner and Bower had found years earlier -- that well educated viewers have high expectations about how television should be used; standards that they can not meet in their everyday lives. It is precisely this discrepency between their high instrumental standards and their ritualized viewing practices that leads many well educated viewers to feel guilt and resentment toward commercial television's alluring lowest-common-denominator

entertainment paradigm. These feelings may help account for the vehement evaluations that some PTV supporters direct toward commercial television.

> . . . I think, why not look at something that's worthwhile instead of some of this crap that makes me sick to my stomach. . . . Like Webster, or WKRP. And honestly some of these, Who's the Boss. . . . They're stupid, they're nauseating, they're terrible. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 59)

Even when the criticism of commercial television is controlled and thoughtful, PTV supporters tend to identify their own high tastes and standards in opposition to the popular aesthetics of commerical television. Thus, in the manner in which they discriminate and identify their own aesthetics as highbrow and elite, PTV supporters project their minority perspective as the correct aesthetic position.

> It's (PTV's) more realistic and it's more interesting to us. . . . Obviously not to many, but it is to us. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 59)

> I think it's (commerical TV is) an insult, even if people who look want to, it's almost an insult to their intelligence. A few more car chases, a little bit more smoke and fire, a low level of intelligence portrayed an awful lot of the. . . (Schaefer, 1987, p. 58)

In his typology of aesthetics Pierre Bourdieu describes three basic categories of taste as revealing and influencing the types of cultural goods toward which individuals will gravitate. Bourdieu notes that the two greatest demographic predictors of cultural consumption are: (a) level of formal education and (b) socioeconomic status, with the latter indicated by the status of the father's occupation. The first category, "legitimate taste," correlates with the highest educational and socioeconomic levels. Like the people who support PTV, purveyors of "legitimate taste" are white-collar college graduates. Bourdieu describes "legitimate taste" as the dominant aesthetic position despite the fact that only a minority of the population falls within this category. Educational institutions influence this aesthetic

positioning by conferring status and enabling career options, but it is the family which transmits the learning-for-learning's sake orientation. The second category, "middle brow taste" is associated with lower-middle class individuals, while "popular taste" is correlated to less educated blue collar workers.

In demographic terms and in their embrace of an educational orientation, along with the consequent rejection of the "popular taste" as vulgar, PTV viewers personify Bourdieu's concept of "legitimate taste." Furthermore, the informational and educational disposition, that PTV supporters describe as conflicting with commercial television's entertainment orientation, is frequently attributed to a larger socialization process; a process defined in terms of family upbringing and formal education. Thus, family and formal education are depicted as the primary transmitters of cultural aesthetics.

> A lot of those really good family oriented really positive feelings come from my upbringing and my lovely family. Because everyone is really close, and we all love each other and we are all very educated. At least a college degree and some even more. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 57)

PTV enthusiasts' learning-for-learning's sake attitude does not necessarily prevent the elitism and snobbery that frequently crops up when legitimate taste is defined in opposition to the "popular taste." Bourdieu notes that expressing intolerance of others' tastes is one of the principle means of asserting one's own aesthetic position.

> I think that probably the more intelligent people watch PTV. . . . I don't think that your normal moron will watch The MacNeil-Lehrer Report and try to see what's going on, but if they can see Richard Dawson kissing ten women on some game show, they can appreciate that. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 8)

Legitimate taste implies training and self-discipline. Yet, at least in terms of receiver skills, television is a very accessible medium. Viewers

do not have to attend school to learn how to watch Richard Dawson kissing ten women. The "popular taste" of television is easy, relaxing, undemanding, seductive. In contrast, it has already been noted that PTV supporters can not reconcile their aesthetic standards with such seductively relaxed, ritualized, and entertaining uses for television. For the aesthetically elite, TV viewing is an active process that requires self-control and receivership skills rather than passivity and minimal effort.

> The programs on public television require you to sit and watch. You have to pay attention.... Most of the programs on network television are written so people can get up, leave, come back and know what's going on.... Commercial TV's sort of like punk rock. You don't have to listen. But if you're listening to classical music you have to really listen. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 8)

The guilt associated with indulgent use of television is particularly acute for PTV enthusiasts because of their extensive exposure to formal education. Steiner (pp. 59-66) notes that formal education valorizes print culture at the expense of other communicative forms. Viewers, who are highly educated, tend to believe that reading is a more active, productive, and valuable experience than watching TV. This may explain some of the hostility that well educated viewers express regarding television, particularly commerical television. Even when they admit to being relaxed and entertained, they have qualms about their behavior. In this respect, all forms of television are viewed as "popular" and print media are viewed as a "higher" cultural form. The relative disregard for visual literacy within formal education is a manifestation of education's print culture roots.

It should also be noted that a small minority of PTV supporters, equate their television standards with religious training rather than formal education. Yet, like other bearers of legitimate culture, these puritanical supporters depict "popular taste" as vulgar, seductive, even pornographic.

> . . . we're Bible students, we take our religion very seriously. And we try to weed out the pornographic and violence without the, oh to the point of being radical and prudish about it. . . . Because of our teachings we appreciate things that aren't as gross as what is currently coming across. We just enjoy TV a great deal. . . But right now it seems like the attitude has changed to such extreme violence and alluding to such extreme pornography that even though I have served in two branches of the service, and I've been around and all that, still we found it rather offensive, and we found it rather unentertaining mostly. It's very unentertaining stuff. So we watch very little TV except that which we feel is of a higher class. . . . We pretty well route ourselves around the normal day-to-day type of programming. We find more worthwhile things to watch on PTV. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 60)

The identification of public television with the traditional legitimate cultural class may help explain the evangelical spirit with which some supporters approach PTV. This evangelical spirit manifests itself as a sense of social responsibility for others aesthetic development.

> I think there must be something that can be done to improve the quality of television appreciation, because people watch what they want to watch. And the majority of people are enjoying trash. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 8)

The evangelic urge may even have loose ties with the American tradition of corporate and foundation giving. With regard to public television, the spirit of corporate philanthropy can be traced back to the Ford Foundation's original outlays for ETV.[6] It is also interesting to note that many individuals who donate to PTV today, support other arts as well. Yet, these contributors generally tend to view their PTV donations as self-serving rather than strictly altruistic.

> It is public television. . . We enjoy it so much. We understand that they need money, and its like a charity. It's a worthwhile cause. Only on this one we really get good returns back. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 109)

The overall accessibility of television makes the distinctions, which Bourdieu draws between the skills involved in appreciating "high taste" cultural products and "popular" cultural products, extremely problematical.

This also appears to be a source of consternation for PTV supporters. Their extensive print culture training, inculcated work ethic, and identification of themselves as the bearers of "high taste" often makes it difficult for them to reconcile the hours they spend with this easy, undemanding, and, in terms of receiver skills, egalitarian medium. As a result they tend to perceive the medium in terms of their own high culture perspective, which draws sharp distinctions between instrumental, educational, and active public television reception and the more habitual, hedonistic, and passive TV viewing practices associated with commercial television. In this sense, PTV contributors project the high culture versus popular culture dichotomy onto the practice of television viewing.

Television Imagery, Realism, and Cultural Values

It is worth noting that Bourdieu's typology was derived from a study of musical appreciation in France. As a result he aligned "popular taste" with art that had representational content -- music that had words and messages. "High taste" was equated with art that relied on formal arrangement -- modern or contemporary orchestral music. However, with a multi-sensory and predominantly representational medium, such as television, the associations of taste appear to be quite different from those outlined by Bourdieu. Indeed, public television contributors, who view themselves as TV's aesthetic elite, seek gratification in the content of PTV's messages. In comparison, commericial television users, who are described as the embodiment of popular aesthetics, are perceived to rely to a much greater extent on formal arrangements, of purely aesthetic visual and aural stimulation.

Thus, the accessible gratifications that supporters of PTV associate with television appear to differ from the gratifications they associate with other older types of media, particularly the print media which dominate formal education. Semiotic theory provides one means of analyzing some of the unique characteristics of television images, characteristics that distinguish the medium from most others.

Nelson Goodman (1968) and Kaja Silverman (1983) suggest that representational visual art does not copy or imitate the real world, but denotes it. For example, a televised image of an object is projected on a relatively flat, two-dimensional, rectangularly framed surface. There is no depth to the TV screen, and clues resulting from our binocular vision tell us that the screen is indeed a flat surface. The video image is rendered in either black-and-white or in colors that rarely match, in terms of luminance and wavelength, those reflected by the original object.[7] In addition, the TV image depicts the object from a single perspective, which was determined by the position of the camera when the shot was taken and the choice of lens used. Finally, several of these visual images are then placed together sequentially, so that the viewer's interpretation of each individual image is modified by the shots that precede and follow it. Thus, even objects and events that have no counterpart in actuality, such as a unicorn flying from cloud to cloud, can be denoted representationally by TV images; images which are inventions rather than copies or analogs of material reality.

Rarely does anyone mistake a televised image for a three-dimensional object. Yet, there is something unique about representational imagery which makes it easy for us to equate our reading of these images with our perception of the material objects or events that the images reference. In

semiotic terminology, this is known as slippage between the signifier and the signified. When we watch a "live" event on television, we tend to believe that we really are witnessing the event. Movement of images within the audio-visual frame and the illusions of continuity editing enable the television screen to seem more like a window than a two-dimensional artistic invention. We relate to the sounds and visual graphics as if the television were a transparent box, or prosthetic device that enables us to experience the represented events first-hand. Roland Barthes (1985, pp. 200-201) calls this semiotic transparency the "message without a code" because the relationship between the audio-visual signifer and the signified seems to require no interpretation on the part of the viewer. Instead, the deciphering of these representational images appears to be quite easy and somewhat analogous to sensory perception.[8] Thus, the reading of TV images can be characterized as easy and passive because it requires little training. In contrast, the interpretation of speech necessitates the learning of conventional syntax and vocabulary codes, and reading print demands still more training which usually takes place in a formal education setting.

While Barthes describes the transparency of representational imagery as dependent upon perceptual analogies between signifiers and signifieds, Goodman asserts that repetitive usage is reponsible for the ease with which certain signifiers have come to represent specific concepts or events.

> . . . practice has rendered the symbols so transparent that we are not aware of any effort, of any alternatives, or of making any interpretation at all. Just here, I think, lies the touchstone of realism: not in quantity of information but in how easily it issues. And this depends upon how stereotyped the mode of representation is, upon how commonplace the labels and their uses have become. (Goodman, 1968, p. 36)

For Goodman, the effect of realism is not derived from some constant or absolute relationship between our perception of reality and our mode of

representation. Instead, a longstanding habit or tradition of representation is simply taken as the standard for realistic and literal denotation. Given the representational nature of most TV programming, this understanding suggests that viewers' will likely evaluate programs and services based on their own habituated standards of realism. Therefore, even when viewers critically question the moral or message of a TV show, they still tend to accept the representational audio-visual images as mirror-like truths. They witness the scenes as events rather than constructed two-dimensional inventions.

The prevailing confusion, between television's representational imagery and the relationship this imagery has to perceived reality, ensures that value judgments about realism are not limited to arguments over the aesthetics of representational styles; but call into question viewers' overall constructions of reality, which ultimately is a matter of experience. Thus nearly all television programming is subjected to standards of realism that require program messages to analogically represent the absurdity, pathos, and drama of lived experience. For this reason viewers of commercial and public television insist that televised messages conform to their unquestioned myths about the world they live in.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that just as PTV supporters criticized commercial television for being excessively violent, sensational, action-oreinted, and pornographic, so to do commercial TV enthusiasts criticize PTV for not conforming to their conceptualization of reality.

> . . . most of the stuff I've seen on public television has been antiseptic. Some of it's controversial but some of it's just too squeaky clean. If you believe in some of these show you'd believe in the Easter Bunny. I know it's not nice to see violence, but let's face it, that's real life. . . . I think I know what you're saying about seeing everything through rose colored glasses sometimes when you're watching public television. . . . You see stuff like that and it's bad for

> you because you say, "Hey, how come our family can't be like that? And Mom's such a pain in the neck. . . ." And rather than seeing the ideal, I'd rather see Kate and Ellen, who are two divorced women, or Archie Bunker. (Schaefer, 1985, pp. 9-10)

PTV viewers' insistence on particular styles of realistic televised content, which consequently reinforce their notions of reality, also enables public television audiences to experience television as a transparent rather than interpretive medium. In this sense many public television supporters see themselves as a minority with a unique interpretation of the more popularly pervasive commercial TV

> . . . We appreciate the kind of programming that they have on Channel 7 (a PTV station). . . . We're not into so many of the shoot-em-ups and the car wrecking and all that. It seems rather superflous and not very real. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 58)

In her discussion of Althusser, ideology, and film, Kaja Silverman (1983, pp. 215-222) asserts that ideology is embodied in the familiar, transparent myths which a society finds self-evident. The extent to which a particular form of signification appears transparent is the extent to which the messages, and more importantly, the habitual style of interpretation for that signification, go unquestioned. And it is this habitual, unquestioning interpretation that reinforces a particular ideological framework. Hence, debates regarding the appropriateness of certain types of television programming assume that there is only one way of interpreting a program; and that way is to experience a program as a "message without a code," or, perhaps more accurately, as a message with a single transparent code which the viewer is not even aware of implementing. Thus, arguments against excessive violence, nudity, or profanity generally assume the interpretational standard of realism, as does the counter-claim that the program is only depicting material reality. In either case, both claims reinforce the dominant ideological media position,

which asserts that television projects actuality. In this sense, both sides foster the notion that television is a medium that leaves the viewer with little room for creative or active reading, since its images and messages must be interpreted in a singular manner. Thus, the dominant ideology posits that TV is a relatively coercive medium, since viewers have few, if any, interpretational options.

In semiotic termninology, there are three types of signification: iconographic, indexical, and symbolic. The extent to which the interpretational reading of a signifier appears self-evident, could be described as the iconicity of the sign. Since the connection between TV's signifiers and signifieds appears to be representational, self-evident, and realistically coded, TV's audio-visual images are generally considered iconographic.

Referents that are tied to their contents by some dynamic or spatial relationship are indexical. For example, the juxtaposition of various iconographic shots in a sequence, indexes the content of the overall sequence by constraining the interpretive frame from one image to the next. Hence, a shot of a person pointing a gun followed by a shot of another person falling indicates that someone was shot rather than tripped. In this case the coercive interpretive code of continuity editing leads viewers to decode the two images as a continuous temporal sequence in which a gunshot felled a man.

Finally, signifiers that are arbitrarily or conventionally tied to their signifieds are called symbols. Symbolic images generally are expansive in the sense that they permit a variety of interpretations. Their meanings are generally less restrained than iconographic or indexical significations.

In Western culture, the amount of conscious effort that is needed to interpret a signifcatory system roughly corresponds to the cultural status associated with its signs and messages. Hence, there exists a hierarchy of interpretation with symbolicity on top, iconicity on the bottom, and indexical interpretation in the middle. This hierarchy associates predominantly iconic and indexical media, like television, with the senses and habituation, the most primitive or lowest forms of culture. On the other hand, more abstract forms of signification are legitimated or valorized within the culture.

Kaja Silverman traces this hierarchical evaluation of signification to Freudian conceptualizations of psychic experience and culture.[9] Briefly, the unconscious in its efforts to avoid pain and achieve pleasure attaches its formless desire to objects, thereby giving form and shape to its desire. The incarnate desire of the unconscious can then be reformed and reshaped from one object to another by transference, a process of condensation or displacement of signs. The inhibitions of a culture makes such transference necessary by repressing from the conscious intellect desires for objects that are taboo or not socially acceptable. Thus, culture comes to fruition through the transformation and redirection of unconscious desires into socially sanctioned means of gratification. In this sense, the move from unconsciousness to consciousness is a basis for hierarchical value in Western culture.

Silverman cites Freud as claiming that unconsious thought relies mainly on sensory, that is visual and auditory, projections. Indeed, by definition, unconscious thought-images have to be interpreted iconographically, or perhaps indexically, because if these images were interpreted symbolically, through activities like deconstruction or

psychoanalysis, the thoughts would become known to the conscious intellect. Therefore iconographic images, such as the transparent audio-visual images used in film and television, are associated with the lower forms of the consciousness hierarchy.

> . . . one of the registers of its (film's) inscription is that used by the unconscious in the production of dreams, it has the capacity not only to depict the displacements of waking desire but to do so in a language familiar to the sleeping subject. The totality of image and sound tracks permits it to engage simultaneously in the discourse of the unconscious and the preconscious. (Silverman, p. 85)

In contrast, reading is associated with a higher level of consciousness and abstraction, since the writing on the page indexically signifies the sound images of words, which in turn symbolically signify some concept, idea, or action. This is fundamentally different from television images whose standards of realism usually restrict interpretation strictly to iconographic or indexical levels. Although both televised and printed signification are denotative, the greater hierarcical abstraction and formal training involved in reading print may account for its priviledged status within our culture. Silverman (p. 35) suggests that the process of abstraction enhances connotation, or more elaborate interpretive associations, and thereby makes the process of reading print seem more active, creative, and rewarding.

The association of audio-visual imagery with subconscious desires may also help explain the affective dimension that is normatively attached to television and other audio-visual media. Indeed, it is much easier to imagine George Orwell's "feelies" in film or television presentations than it would be in printed media. In order for these types of images to remain manifestations of subconscious desires, evaluations must continue to be based upon standards of reality that constrain judgments strictly to

iconicity. Therefore, any attempt to utilize television symbolically, not only defies a prevalent cultural norm, but it also runs contrary to powerfully narcistic interpretational impulses which are reinforced by both ideolgoically-bound, habitual standards of realism and the societal repression of socially unacceptable desires.

The combined might of these narcistic forces has inhibited the development of the kind of abstract, "high culture" aesthetic for television that has come to fuller fruition in more traditional media such as music and print. This "high culture" aesthtic is traditionally indicated by multiple standards of interpretation which permit form and content to be evaluated and appreciated as distinct entities. Thus, while the formal elements of music have many of the same sensually appealing characteristics as audio-visual imagery, a much healthier tradition of symbolic interpretation also identifies form with content. And with the possible exception of poetry, printed media is almost exclusively interpreted through a symbolic framework that priviledges content over form. In this sense, PTV supporters' search for meaningful content amid the tyranny of television's realistic forms may represent a fledgling attempt to develop a consciously "high culture" aesthetic for the relatively new medium.

Intentionality, Cooptation, and the History of PTV

Probably no other form of mediated message relies on the association of displaced unconscious desire, cultural norms, and representational interpretation of imagery more prevalently than advertising on commerical television. Many advertising messages are so blatently incongruous with PTV supporters' experience that these jaded consumers make the commercial appeals into targets of vehement criticism.

> PTV doesn't have commercials teaching your kids to chew with their mouths open and scream and holler and how to put your teeth in without them moving, and how to smell good and everything. I get so disgusted with the commercials. It's like they're idiots and they're talking to idiots, and I'm not an idiot. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 6)

Yet, one advertising theory posits, that within our society the repression and displacement of desire is so great and the ideology of realistic interpretation is so habitually invoked, that even if an ad is temporarily critiqued, the assimilation of the message by the unconscious will render the ad effective. The representational imagery of the ad is utilized by the unconscious to displace ungratified desire of one sort or another into gratifiable desire for the product in the ad. The desire for the product is latent and, therefore, breeds consumption only at some latter time and place. This displacement occurs as a result of a metonymic process which associates two disparate signifieds due to the proximity or interaction of their signifers within a shot sequence.

If this type of commercial appeal effectively sells products, commerical television programming is one of the most important products that is sold. Serial drama, sports events, soap operas, game shows, and other popular commercial genres have the potential of displacing desire for sex, violence, domination, wealth, or whatever into a desire to watch programming that contains and manipulates realistic iconographic signifers of those desires.

Commercial television is not unique in this regard. A person's urge to watch public television, or even read a book, is fundamentally an urge to exercise, reshape, or manipulate displaceable desires. But on further thing that sets commercial television apart from other more legitimated artforms is the intentions of its origninal producers, particularly those of the corporate sponsors. Usually, those corporate producers simply want to

have their products recognized as normative necessities within the culture. As has already been illustrated, the unconscious and the preconscious are the sites where this process of insertion occurs. On the other hand, producers of legitimate art intend their work to function on all three levels of consciousness. Hence, legitimate artforms should be amenable to the more abstract and logical utilities of the conscious intellect, as well as the more primitive and affective mental processes of the unconscious and preconscious. This implies that legitimate artforms should be amenable to symbolic, as well as icongraphic and indexical, interpretations.

In his content analysis of contemporay television forms, Raymond Williams (1974) described the contrast between public service and commerical television forms as being more apparent in America than in Great Britian. He maintained that American commercial television was more overtly consumption oriented than commerical television in Britain and that American public service broadcasting evolved as a purer form of public service than its BBC counterparts.

According to Williams, American commercial television does not so much offer specific programs, but sequences of images wrapped within other sequences that flow past the viewer in rapid fire succession. These images blend together to make up the real flow of commercial broadcasting: a staccato of metonomically unified consumable reports and products organized around the formal elements of speed, variety and miscellaneity. Williams asserts that this buzz of consumable images is the real message of American commercial television. Representational denotation and the stereotypical interpretational conventions that necessarily accompany it help transmit the contents of profit television. Thus, rather than disrupting content, commercial interruptions and the juxtaposition of miscelleanous

stereotypical images form the ultimate message of commercial TV; a message which reinforces the ideology of our commodity culture.

Although this understanding is rarely intellectualized by PTV supporters, it is a major impetus behind the strong distinctions they draw between public service television and the more dominant commerical paradigm. Some of these PTV supporters assert that opportunities for reflection and perspective become lost when program content and continuity are undermined. This realization not only positions the PTV supporter in opposition to commercial television's unceasing flow of commodities, but in opposition to modern culture's emphasis on strictly iconographic and indexical forms. Nowhere is the desire for transmission of alternative contents and messages so apparent as when PTV supporters talk about their children's use of television.

> . . . It's (PTV) just informative, and it's interesting, it sparks his (her son's) mind. He asks questions and makes comments. Talks about things that he's heard. When you sit and watch cartoons all day, that doesn't do anything for him. . . . A lot of that stuff, it doesn't inform him or keep his mind going. (Schaefer, 1987, pp. 55-56)

Williams notes that broadcasting has historically been a medium devoid of content. He suggests that the initial intention in the development of both radio and television was to market hardware of communication technology. Broadcasting's original market share did not refer to audiences or programming, but to the numbers of radio and TV receivers sold. Television was originally developed as an abstract process, with little concern for the content or messages that could be transmitted over it. It was only after the fact of invention, when advertising interests filled the message gap, that content became defined in terms of commercial interests and audience flow.

In contrast, the founders of educational television in America clearly intended to transmit certain types of contents. Powell (1962) writes that, even before the development of ETV facilities, there was an active discussion regarding the nature of educational programming. Such programming was to be continuous, instead of episodic or sequential, and it was expected to encourage viewers to engage in consecutive thinking. Indeed, ETV programming was originally conceived in opposition to the already developing commercial paradigms. In this sense, educational television was born as an attempt to exploit the already existing broadcast technology for educational purposes.

It is difficult to think of the early days of public service broadcasting without reflecting upon the role that educational institutions played in its development. The few individuals who organized the original lobbying effort on behalf of public service television had strong ties to the academic community. Many of the initial ETV stations were sponsored by colleges and universities. Yet, this early alliance between the high institutions of print culture and the developing broadcast alternative was marginalized by contradictory interests.

From the start, colleges and universities had difficulty supporting the expensive new technology. Perhaps even more significantly, other than for purposes of institutional status, sponsoring colleges and universities had little real need for television. Bourdieu noted that two of the primary functions of higher education are to inculcate print culture and confer status and position on worthy candidates. Toward these ends, broadcasting had little to offer. It's representational imagery was easily accessible, and its signal was egalitarian, that is, available to anyone with a TV set. So in spite of the fact that educational institutions were in the process of

expanding enrollments throughout the 1950s and 1960s, encouraging unrestricted television access to educational materials was not a direction that many institutions were willing to consider. In addition, commercial television, as a culture product, was already beginning to be viewed as both a competitor and an inhibitor of print culture. And although sponsoring ETV may have at first been viewed as a means of coopting the attractive power of the rival technology, it soon became apparent that ETV lacked the pervasive promotional power of its commercial counterpart. Educational institutions increasingly viewed their ETV stations as a budgetary expense rather than a cultural asset. As a result, many ETV stations were housed but not nurtured within educational institutions, while citizens' committees in most large metropolitan areas formed their own public service stations. Thus, the attempt by educational institutions and the purveyors of print culture to exploit the newly available technology met with only marginal short-term success. However, the effort left a nearly indelible academic "high culture" imprint on public service TV.

> . . . I see them (PTV) as a very positive force in that they're showing you things, and they have programs, NOVA and others, Planet Earth. . . . there's a great many of these programs that are so informative that I do believe that a person could get the equivalent of several years of college education, if he paid attention to what he is watching. (Schaefer, 1987, pp. 56-57)

ETV may not have survived its first decade had it not been for the intervention of some strange bedfellows. Principal among these was the Ford Foundation, which Willard Rowland (1986, p. 57-58) described as an institution with a "high culture, academic, moderately progressive tone." The Ford Foundation and several other philanthropic organizations provided ETV with the large grants needed to start facilities in many states, as well as construction of a program distribution system. Rowland notes that the

capital accumulations dispersed by the Ford Foundation have been criticized for benevolently advancing the interests of western multi-national corporations. These critics suggest that the Foundation fostered the creation of numerous alternative social institutions which deflected criticism away from the institutions of the dominant culture.

While it is likely that such a scenario fails to present a hermenutically sound characterization of the activities of the Ford Foundation with regard to ETV, the strategy of deflecting dissent and avoiding social responsibility does appear to apply quite readily to one other early benefactor of ETV. Powell notes that commercial television took an interest in supporting the development of many educational television stations. Usually the help from commercial broadcasters came in the form of technical assistance from established commercial stations or networks. In addition, specific commercial broadcasters sometimes lobbied for the establishment of an ETV station in their market as a means of limiting their commercial competition. Yet, it was their own commitments to public interest programming that provided the greatest motivation for commercial stations to support ETV. Many of these commercial broadcasters believed that the forces pressuring them to produce and broadcast unprofitable public service programming would be diminished if there was a separate public service broadcast system. So despite the fact that the FCC had been anything but vigilant in championing the public's interest with respect to broadcasting, the threat of future regulatory interference led the industry's private interests to support the new service.

Hence, with purposeful help from a variety of sources, ETV stations slowly staggered into existence and began broadcasting throughout much of the United States. The small but persistent audiences, who infrequently

tuned in to these stations consisted mainly of socioeconomically upscale, highly educated, politically liberal, whites, whose attitudes personified the values of American higher education and the Ford Foundation.

Dissatisfaction within the system over ETV's incessant funding struggles led to the establishment of the Carnegie Commission and the eventual passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. This new political enfranchisement brought added accountability and the redefinition of ETV into the more egalitarian "public television," whose prime-time genres include more visually-oriented nature and science programs, public affairs and cultural offerings, along with children's shows and some formal on-air education. Except for the latter, these kinds of programs represent a perceptible shift away from more rigorous academic fare toward more visually appealing production values and accessible contents. This more comprehensive approach went hand-in-hand with public funding and paved the way for the subsequent expansion of the PTV audience. However, within the eye of the political arena, PTV's persistent high culture, liberal, white, upper-middle class reputation soon came under attack, both from minorities and from the political right. Under the influence of these pressures the service's political base of support weakened and public television was forced to turn to enhanced corporate underwriting and viewer contributions to maintain its funding levels.

Hence, in the late 1970s and 1980s the well educated, white, socioeconomically upscale segement of the now much larger PTV audience became its empowered viewers. Through their contributions they actively pursued content-oriented gratifications and goals, while at the same time reinforcing their own strongly felt identifications with "high culture." In this sense, many viewers liked to think of their donations to PTV as a

means of empowering themselves and their search for sustenance within television's cultural supermarket.

> PTV is quality because it's supported by the public rather than commercial firms. The commercial stations are more interested in making money, whereas the people who are paying for TV are interested in getting what they want. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 6)

> I enjoy the information that I get from them (nature shows). It's not like reading a book and just looking at the pictures. I get something out of them because I love animals of all different types. I'm interested in the way adaptation takes place. And their lives and lifestyles, it fascinates me. (Schaefer, 1987, p. 653)

Appealing directly to the viewer represents PTV's latest round in the continuing struggle of intentions between political and economic interests, high-culture identifications, and corporate intentions. Although many PTV supporters and viewers are barely aware of it, their upscale demographics have also increasingly become the subject of corporate underwriters' apparently philanthropic intentions.

> I used to think how wonderful, that the big companies, like Exon and Gulf, and all of them, were funding this wonderful service. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 32)

> The large corporations must get a choice of what programs they want to sponsor. If they're backing it, it must be something that they approve of. With my money I'd want to have the same privilege. Maybe people like us don't but if you contribute largely enough, like Mobil Corporation. But even us, if we have an interest in one particular program, and make our contribution during that program, then I think the station would know that people like that program. (Schaefer, 1985, p. 32)

As public television is sustained by the conflicting interests of self-serving corporate underwriters, foundation philanthropists, political coalitions, and demographically stratified individual contributors who assert their claim to legitimate aesthetic sensibilities of formal education, it should be noted that each of these interests not only provides sustenance for the service, but places contradictory constraints on it as well. For

example, the recent reliance on corporate underwriting seems to contradict PTV's original mission of establishing a public service medium amenable to higher levels of mental processing and symbolic interpretation, while reliance on support from a broad viewing audience also shows little near-term potential of breaking the aesthetic stranglehold of habituated realistic representation. In contrast, socio-economic stratification offers hope for aligning PTV with print culture's more symbolic educational agenda, but also serves to reinforce elitist class-bound notions of aesthetic legitimacy which might prevent the development of a more democratically egalitarian use of the medium. As a result, the mission of public television remains blurred, as these and other constituencies quietly strike a balance between their conflicting interests.

Concluding Remarks

This work stimulates speculation on a number of widely held beliefs about television as a medium, and public television in particular.

First, the notion that television is a monolithic medium needs reexamination. If the medium were really the message, viewers would make few distinctions between form and content, or between the way various televised contents are used. Instead, the differentiation evident in this research suggests that contents, viewer expectations, institutional intentions, and many other factors influence both how television is used and the messages the medium conveys. So although there might be dominant aspects to television, such as realism and commercialism, the medium is not necessarily monolithic. Hence, traditional uses and gratifications approaches, which treat television as an undifferentiated medium, may be misleading.

Second, conceptualizaitons of television as a revolutionary medium can also be misleading. Although television may be a medium that is still in its infancy, the forces outlined in this paper are not whizzing by at some incomprehesible pace but have developed over decades. Even broadcasting's electronic technology is now well over half a century old. Television usage is also dependent upon a wide variety of cultural and situational circumstances, such as viewers' socio-economic status, institutional affiliations and intentions, family and consumer behaviors, and the circumstances of television reception. So television practices are inextricably tied to cultural phenomena that have evolved over long periods of time. Hence, rather than being viewed as a clear break with the past, television might better be understood as a historically-bound medium that is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. In this light, like the slow

development of print culture, we may find ourselves in the early stages of the development of television routines, institutions, and aesthetics.

Third, TV is generally viewed as a lower-status popular art form largely because the most prevalent American television practices have developed in opposition to both the precepts of formal education and the value hierarchy of consciousness in Western society. These understandings are tied to American television's strong association with commercial interests and viewers' typical interpretational response to representational imagery. Habituated practices of interpreting television's audio-visual images as perceptions, icons, or indexes relegate most television experiences to less-conscious levels of mental processing. In contrast, more highly valued and actively conscious denotative or symbolic interpretational stances are less frequently practiced with television than they are with other media, such as print or music, whose signifiers are more obviously differentiated from their signified messages. Therefore, most television viewing is identified with easy and passive reception while older media are legitimated by the conscious effort and oppositional possibilities of formal education. In this sense, habitual realistic presentation may be a major vehicle sustaining our commodicty culture.

Fourth, television is believed to be an unusually coercive and explicit medium with a singular, and somewhat unavoidable message. Largely for this reason, American television has become a political and ideological battleground. The historic intentions of commercial televison in the United States and the medium's association with subconscious mental processing reinforce the notion that TV is coercive. However, the ideological contention surrounding television may have less to do with programs espousing liberal or conservative politics than it does with the dominance

of realistic representational styles of presentation and interpretation. Indeed, if there is a dominant ideology with regard to television, it may be that the medium has little potential as a provocative medium or artform capable of supporting a variety of interpretations and messages. Public television viewers' opposition to commercial intentions and the fledgling development of an information-oriented TV aesthetic suggests that greater differentiation of TV practies may be evolving for this very young, yet increasingly differentiated, medium.

With regrad to public television, it seems that the intentions of the service are now so complexly interwoven that it is difficult to precisely state its institutional mission. Yet, when there is clear direction, and some consensus regarding the value of its mission, PTV can produce powerful cultural products, of which Sesame Street is the most notable example. However, on the adult level, such purposeful guidance and consensus has been noticably absent. The various constituencies that support the institution have been less able to forge agreement on the means and aims of adult television than they have with children's programming.

Toward this end, it might be helpful to consider a few broad points. The constituencies supporting public television are sometimes contentious, with a variety of contradictory agendas. For this reason, public television should be expected to be a site of vigorous cultural contention. Yet it is important that the contention be managed so that the system is not robbed of energy, direction, and invention. The various constituent groups need to accept their less than preeminent position in the overall political field so that both workable consensus and compromise can be achieved. Toward this end, the constituencies that now define themselves in opposition to lowest-common-denominator television, commodity culture, and popular aesthetics

might attempt to coalesce around a common vision of what PTV should be, rather than what it should not be. In areas where full consensus can not be achieved, a clearer understanding of the political diversity of the constituencies that make up the PTV coalition might breed an atmosphere where compromise and tolerance allows for more diverse and inventive forms of programming.

Finally, changes in form, aesthetics, and content are evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and a long term perspective is in order. It is possoible that public service television will eventually be viewed as a research and development program in cultural production. When seen in this light, both educational television and public television appear to have successful track records. After less than four decades of relatively minor investments, ETV has spawned PTV which, in turn, has demonstrated the feasibility of many of contemporary television's most novel services. The fruition of C-SPAN, The Discovery Channel, fine arts programming, and many educational children's programs was arguably aided by public service television's long-term commitments to program and audience development. A stronger appreciation for this role might help relieve some of the short-term fiscal and ratings pressures that the system presently faces, while consciously encouraging inventiveness in the future.

Notes

1 Educational television (ETV) was the seedling from which public television in the United States grew. John Walker Powell (1962) documented the birth of this seedling as dependent upon the efforts of 20 individuals. These twenty enthusiasts mobilized the educational community into a concerted lobbying effort that pushed the FCC to reserve television channels for public service broadcasters. The reservations announced in April, 1952 marked the beginning of a decade when educational television stations were rushed onto the air. With Ford Foundation assistance, in the form of expertise and financing, colleges, universities, and community citizens committees secured the licenses and facilities to eventually start transmitting. The Ford Foundation also initiated a national program distribution service (NET), which remained the major educational program distributer until the establishment of PBS in 1969. Thus, by 1966 a national distribution system had been formed and 114 educational television stations were broadcasting in nearly evey state in the Union (Carnegie Commission, 1967). The primary funding for educational television came from local and state governments, the Ford Foundation, and educational institutions.

Educational television consisted mainly of instructional and public affairs programs that failed to attract great numbers of viewers. In addition, many Americans, particularly those in rural areas, still did not have access to an ETV signal. By the mid 1960's only one-in-eight TV households claimed to view even small amounts of ETV on a weekly basis (Carnegie Commission, 1967). In distinguishing ETV viewers from nonviewers, Schramm, Lyle, and de Sola Pool (1963, pp. 59-90) described the typical educational television audience member as representing only a small segment of society: well educated with high socioeconomic status, an achiever who works hard to reach future goals, a fan of high culture, a seeker of information, active, a family person with other viewers in the household, slightly more inclinded to be liberal, and a person more likely to use selective and discriminating television viewing practices.

The decade of the '60's saw the Federal Government become a major funding force in ETV. The Educational Television Facilities Act in 1962 stimulated the growth of ETV by providing large amounts of matching federal fund for the construction and expansion of facilities. At the same time pressures were mounting both inside and outside the ETV system to broaden the programming base to include more generally appealing cultural and public affairs programming. The lure of increasing federal and corporate sponsorship, as well as educational broadcasters' dissatisfaction with their underfunded elite service, gradually developed into a movement for more popular, "alternative," programming (Burke, 1972b, p. 180). The Carnegie Commission's decision to redefine educational television as "public television" reflected this desire to shift the institution's emphasis from small and elite audiences toward a larger viewing public.

The passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 not only changed the name, but the structure and content of educational television. The Act brought into being the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and set the stage for the birth of PBS and the interconnected network of public television stations that still exists today. Infusions of federal funding paced PTV's dramatic growth through 1978. Indeed, Federal Government outlays increased from $6.8 million in 1967 to $133.5 million in 1978, as PTV's overall income more than quadrupled during the period. And as Federal involvement increased so did the audiences for PTV. The percentage of American TV households watching PTV on a weekly basis increased from 12.5% in 1966 to 37.6% in 1978 (Carnegie Commission, p. 25; and PBS, 1985a, p. 1).

2 From a survey distributed in 1970, Bower (1973, pp. 53-55) described the audience for PTV as composed largely of toddlers and the well educated middle aged, who lived in less isolated parts of the country, with very young adults and the elderly - under 20 and over 60 - conspicuously absent. As Public television become more popular, many of the groups that had been conspicuously absent in 1970 were watching PTV on a regular basis in 1980 (Bower, 1985, pp. 49-56).

3 By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a shift of political opinion toward free-market strategies, and economic woes, including double-digit inflation and budget deficits, made federal funding for PTV funding a low political priority. From 1978 through 1984 the total inflation adjusted federal outlay for public television decreased 42.2% from its 1978 peak (NAPTS, 1985). These developments led PTV stations to obtain funding from other sources, particularly corporate underwriting and voluntarily solicited viewer contributions. The success of these efforts is evidenced by the fact that, despite the attenuation of federal funding, PTV experienced a modest (1.5%) overall increase in real income during the period from 1978 through 1984 (PBS, 1985a).

4 In several recent studies (Scheefer 1985, 1987) contributors described themselves as using PTV in a variety of ways to reinforce existing values, attitudes, and desires. They characterized PTV and commercial television as sharply dichotomous services. Contributors said they overwhelmingly appreciated the informative and educational functions of PTV content over the passively relaxing, entertaining, lowbrow, titilating, escapist, and consumption orientation of commercial television. Many of these supporters espoused a desire to selectively use television for their informative and educational purposes, some appeared to feel shame and guilt that their heavy and habitual commercial television viewing did not meet their own standards. Given their social learning objectives, PTV donors described a more active and attentively focused use of public television, and, in some cases, such as when calling in a contribution during a fund drive, even an interactive use of the medium.

A wide range of familial and household interactions with children, spouses, parents, grandchildren, and siblings were also associated with viewing and donating. Many contributors described their viewing and support as dependent upon a process of family socialization that fostered appreciation for philanthropy, socially responsible activism, and the values of public television. In a few cases, donations were tied to nostalgic programming that had brought on fond personal and familial memories. In many more instances, contributions indexed their support for aesthetic, environmental, educational, or political beliefs that specific PTV programs were perceived as espousing. Indeed, PTV was often described as providing an opportunity for transmitting cultural values by enabling people to model media and activist behaviors to other members of their families.

5 The seminal work of four authors is specifically cited in the essay. Pierre Bourdieu's "The Aristocracy of Culture" (1986) provides a postmodern framework for understanding distinctions of aesthetics and taste in relation to formal education and socioeconomic status. Although Bourdieu's highly analytical quantitative study deals exclusively with French taste and class consciousness, his work informs the high culture versus popular culture dichotomy that is germane to American public television.

Raymond Williams's Television, Technology and Cultural Form (1974) once again utilizes a cultural studies orientation to perform a content analysis of commercial and public service television in the United States and Britain. Williams's work is premised on the notion that technologies, such as television, are not discovered, but, instead, are invented to fill the needs of certain groups or constituencies, and then sometimes coopted by other groups for different purposes. Given that technology is intentionally created and utilized, Williams asks by whom and for what intention?

Finally, the psychic and social implications of television's representational encoding-decoding techniques are analyzed in light of the work of two semioticians. Nelson Goodman's Languages of Art (1968) deconstructs the representational paradigm of visual art, while Kaja Silverman's The Subject of Semiotics (1983) elaborates semiotic theory to Freudian and Lacanian understandings of the human psyche.

6 Powell (1962) describes in detail the role of the Ford Foundation, and particularly the efforts of one of its managers, Scotty Fletcher, in the development of ETV. In the era of American economic dominance following World War II, corporate and foundation philanthropy was generally viewed in a positive light. Powell makes the case that ETV would not have come into fruition had it not been for the Ford Foundation, which was publicly perceived as the major backer of ETV from its inception through the formation of the Carnegie Commission in 1965.

7 The physics of TV is quite different from the physics of light reflected off three dimensional objects. Objects reflect light waves that strike them whereas regular screen television sets rely on electron beams to excite phosphors which then radiate. These small irradiated phosphors are then blended visually to form a variety of colors and saturations. The TV process tends to produce crude and garishly colored images rather than faithful reproductions of videographed objects.

8 This essay skirts the nature versus nurture dispute with regard to the interpretation of film and TV imagery. Goodman's (1968) assertion, that realistic interpretation of visual imagery is conventional or a learned habit, has been called into question by many researchers. Messaris's (1988) review of cross-cultural studies with still pictures suggests that many of the processes which human beings use to decode two-dimensional images are physiologically-bound to the process of visual decoding utilized in the everyday perception. Hobbs (1988) also notes that point-of-view video editing techniques are based on real-world perceptual skills. Thus, there is much dispute as to whether the apparent confusion of realistic audio-visual imagery with "real-life" perception is driven by nurtured habit or innate physiological processing. Yet, the semiotic work of Barthes (1985) and Silverman (1983) moves beyond this significant dispute to expose the lack of consciousness involved in realistic interpretation of created images; and it is their argument which is most germane to this essay.

9 Although Silverman also elaborates on the hierarchical nature of filmic signification in Lacanian terminology, for the sake of brevity I prefer to utilize more simplistic and familiar Freudian concepts to outline my case with regard to television imagery.

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